UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

SENATE

23rd March 2016

MINUTES

Present: Professor Sir David Eastwood (Vice-Chancellor and Principal, in the Chair); Professor D Adams (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor K Armour; Professor T Arnull; Professor J Bale (Pro-Vice-Chancellor); Professor S Becker (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor H Draper; Ms R Evans; Dr D Ghica; Professor J Green; Professor A Guariglia; Professor D Hannah; Professor M Hannon; Ms I Lenga (Vice-President of the Guild); Professor P Lumley; Professor A Lymer; Professor U Martin; Professor H Mehanna; Professor C Miall; Professor M Nimmo (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Ms M Parvaz; Dr A Phillips; Professor Z Pikramenou; Dr S Quigley; Professor J Rowe; Professor K Rowlingson; Ms M Salama; Professor I Sansom; Professor G Schaffer; Professor A Schofield (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor M Simmons; Professor T Softley (Pro-Vice-Chancellor); Mr R Sowden; Professor A Tickell (Provost and Vice-Principal); Dr G Timmins; Ms L Tulley; Dr K Voelz; Professor G Watson; Professor M Whitby (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College) and Dr N Wilkin.

Also present: Mr P Clack (Director of External Relations) (for Minute 16/03), Ms C Gilbert (Director of External Relations) (for Minutes 16/03 and 16/04), Ms C McDonough (Assistant Secretary); Mr L Sanders (Registrar & Secretary) and Ms A Simcox (Governance Officer).

Apologies: Professor M Calvert; Dr E Fulton; Dr D Fuller; Professor S Hunston; Professor J Martin; Dr D Moran; Professor P Moss; Dr C Ray; Professor C Ross and Professor D Shepherd.

Absent: Dr D Bailey and Professor P Kumar.

Papers: The minute book contains copies of all written papers or reports to which reference is made below unless indicated otherwise.

16/01 Minutes of previous meeting

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th November 2015 be approved (SEN.16.03.**01**). There were no matters arising.

16/02 Vice-Chancellor's Items

Considered: a report from the Vice-Chancellor (SEN.16.03.**02**).

(1) BUCU

Reported:

(a) the risk of local industrial action during revision week and marking/exam boards and the risk of national industrial action in the form of an assessment boycott;

(b) that in March 2014 the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) had been granted authority by Senate to approve adjustments to assessment arrangements in the event of an assessment boycott by UCU;

(c) a further update would be provided at the next meeting of Senate.

(2) ***[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]***

16/03 ***[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]***

16/04 Recruitment and Admissions Update

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

Considered: the summary of applications and offers (as at 3rd March 2016) along with an assessment of the position for home undergraduate based on offers made, Applicant Visit Day registrations, and acceptances received (SEN.16.03.**04**).

Reported that:

(a) to (h) ***[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]***

(i) the recruitment cycle remained volatile, noting that the focus of the Admissions Office was now on conversion of offers;

(j) the performance of the University would continue to be monitored over the coming weeks but current indications were that the University was on track for a positive recruitment outcome for 2016 entry.

16/05 Adoption of Grade Point Average System

Considered: the adoption of a Grade Point Average system at the University (SEN.16.03.**05**).

Reported:

(a) that the University in 2011 had initiated a set of internal and external (within the Russell Group) discussions on the idea of introducing 'Grade Point Average' (GPA) as a measure of recording student achievement at graduation. It was also one of the 25 institutions which had taken part in the National GPA Pilot from 2013-15;

(b) the envisaged benefits of GPA, including greater granularity in assessment, active engagement and motivation of students throughout their degree programme, and increased employability in a global market for graduates;

(c) the proposal was that a GPA score (to two decimal places) should be introduced using the same module and year of study weighting algorithm as for honours degree classification. A pilot of GPA was planned for 2017 graduation with a full roll out and publication of a GPA score for students graduating in July 2018. This was on the basis that the system for determining degree classification should be maintained and run in tandem with GPA for as long as required;

(d) that UEB had requested consideration be given to establishing a means of recognising exceptional performance in situations where the overall mean mark would not be reflected in the highest GPA value (4.25). Modelling studies of recent graduating cohorts had identified a small number of students, particularly within the Physical Sciences (quantitative disciplines), who would achieve a maximum GPA, but would have a significantly higher overall mean mark than was reflected by the GPA. The potential for introducing a system of recognising exceptional achievement was being investigated. Any recommendations arising from this further investigation would be presented to a future meeting of Senate;

(e) the importance of ensuring that the launch of the pilot was supported by an effective communications strategy to ensure that both students and graduate employers were fully briefed on the introduction of GPA;

(f) the outcome of the pilot would be reported to Senate in due course.

Resolved that:

(i) the recommendations from the National GPA report be accepted in principle as set out in Paper SEN.16.03.**05**;

(ii) a GPA score (to two decimal places) be introduced for students graduating in July 2018

using the same module and year of study weighting algorithm as for honours degree classification, noting that the outcome of the pilot in 2017 would inform the arrangements for this;

(iii) the system for determining degree classification be maintained and run in tandem with GPA for as long as required;

(iv) in the first instance, the GPA would appear on the degree transcript, but not on the graduation certificate.

16/06 Lord Stern's Review of the Research Excellence Framework

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

Senate ***considered*** the University's response to the call for evidence from Lord Stern's Review of the Research Excellence Framework (SEN.16.03.**06**).

Reported that:

(a) Lord Stern's review of the Research Excellence Framework had been commissioned to ensure future university research funding was allocated more efficiently, offered greater rewards for excellent research and reduced the administrative burden on institutions;

(b) the Government, Lord Stern and the Review Steering Group were agreed on the vital role of quality-related research funding as part of the UK's dual-funding system;

(c) the University's response to the call for evidence had also been considered by UEB and Research Committee, together with contributions from the Colleges. The response deadline for the submission of the University's response was noon on 24th March 2016;

(d) the University had expressed its preference for preference was for retention of peer level review and discipline level assessment.

Resolved: that the draft submission of the University to the call for evidence by Lord Stern's Review of the Research Excellence Framework be approved as set out in Paper SEN.16.03.**06**.

16/07 Research Performance Update

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

Considered: the research grants performance information for the six month period from 1st August 2015 to 31st January 2016 and the monthly research performance update for February 2016 (SEN.16.03.**07**).

Reported that:

(a) to (e) ***[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]***

(f) the future targets for annual research grants performance were being reviewed, noting that the challenges of the research funding environment had increased since the current targets had been set and it was therefore timely to review the future targets in this context to ensure they remained realistic;

(g) the scope to increase the University's market share of Russell Group research grant income. This was recognised to be as important a measure of the University's research performance as that of the amount of research income generated;

(h) the University had reviewed the structure of its research awards support teams and had strengthened the amount and quality of research support available to academics across the University.

16/08 Analysis of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

Considered: the results of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey for 2015 (SEN.16.03.**08**).

Reported that:

(a) broadly the University's scores were in line with the Russell Group and 83% of PGRs were satisfied overall;
(c) actions had been identified at College and School level to address low scoring areas;
(d) the aim was to increase participation for the next round of the survey;
(e) the University's highest satisfaction scores were in the areas of 'supervision' and 'research skills';
(f) the lowest satisfaction scores were in the area of 'research culture'. Although there had been some improvement in this area since the last survey in 2013, the priority of increasing this score further for 2016 remained. The need to share good practice across the University to support achievement of this priority was recognised.

16/09 ***[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]***

16/10 Key Information Sets 2015

Noted: the Key Information Sets for 2015/16 (SEN.16.03.**10**).

16/11 Amendment of Ordinances 2.9.1 and 2.13.1

Considered: the proposed amendment of Ordinances 2.9.1 and 2.13.1 (SEN.16.03.**11**).

Reported that:

(a) Ordinance 2.9.1 provided for up to four members of Senate to be co-opted by Senate on the recommendation of the Vice-Chancellor;
(b) the recent establishment of a number of additional Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor roles had identified the need to increase the number of co-opted members on Senate so that those with a remit relevant to the business of Senate could be represented and contribute to meetings of Senate as members. It was therefore proposed that the number of co-opted members of Senate be increased from four to six.

Recommended: to Council that Ordinances 2.9.1 and 2.13.1 be amended as set out at Appendix 1.

16/12 Research Committee - Revised Membership and Terms of Reference

Considered: the revision of the membership and terms of reference of the Research Committee (SEN.16.03.**12**).

Reported that:

(a) the review of the effectiveness of the University Council had recommended the disestablishment of the Knowledge Transfer and Engagement Sub-Committee of SPRC and merging of its business with the Research Committee which reported to Senate. Having reviewed the experience of operating the Sub-Committee for the past two years, the view of the Review Panel was that the re-integration of the business of the Sub-Committee with that of the Research Committee represented a more effective and productive way forward given the important synergies between Research, Knowledge Transfer and Business Engagement. This recommendation had been approved by Council on 27th November 2015;
(b) in view of the decision of Council, Senate was invited to consider and approve the revised membership and terms of reference of the Research Committee.

Resolved: that the revision to the membership and terms of reference of the Research Committee be approved as set out in Paper SEN.16.03.**12**.

16/13 Report from Heads of Colleges

Noted: the report from the Heads of Colleges regarding recent developments (SEN.16.03.**13**). This included a summary of the outcome of the recent consultation in relation to research and teaching in Hydrogeology.

16/14 Report from the Nominations Committee

Considered: a report from the meeting of the Nominations Committee held on 23rd February 2016 (SEN.16.03.**14**).

Resolved: that the recommendations for the award of honorary degrees be approved as set out in Paper SEN.16.03.**14**.

16/15 Report from the Research Committee

Noted: a report from the meetings of the Research Committee held on 17th November 2015 and 26th January 2016 (SEN.16.03.**15**).

16/16 Report from the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee

Noted: a report from the meetings of the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee held on 11th December 2015 and 3rd February 2016 (SEN.16.03.**16**).

16/17 Report from the University Education Committee

Noted: a report from the meetings of the University Education Committee held on 2nd December 2015 and 21st January 2016 (SEN.16.03.**17**).

16/18 Report from the University Quality Assurance Committee

Noted: a report from the meeting of the University Quality Assurance Committee held on 1st December 2015 and 23rd February 2016 (SEN.16.03.**18**).

16/19 Report to Senate on the work of Council-approved Panels during 2015

Noted: the report to Senate on the work of Council-approved Panels during 2015 (SEN.16.03.**19**).

16/20 Programme of Meetings 2015/16

Noted: that the final meeting of Senate for 2015/16 would be held on Wednesday 8th June 20016 at 2.00pm.